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What is **MESSIANIC JUDAISM?**

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What Is Messianic Judaism?



Justin Rogers, Ph.D.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: AP auxiliary writer Dr. Rogers is the Director of the Graduate school of Theology and Associate Professor of Bible at Freed-Hardeman University. He holds an M.A. in New Testament from Freed-Hardeman University as well as an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Hebraic, Judaic, and Cognate Studies from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.]

"They wish to be both Jews and Christians, but are neither Jews nor Christians." This is how the church father Jerome (ca. A.D. 345-430) characterized the "Nazareans," one of the early Jewish-Christian groups that observed the Law of Moses while claiming faith in Jesus.¹ The writings of the church fathers, in fact, regularly featured comments about early Christian sects who continued to observe the Mosaic Law. The existence of these groups should not surprise us since the New Testament already contests those who seek to impose the Mosaic Law on Christians. For example, Paul writes to the Galatians, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4, ESV).

The tendency of some Christians to adopt the Mosaic Law, in part or in totality, has not faded with the passage of time. A modern movement, known as Messianic Judaism, seeks to return to these ancient ways. Although there is great variety

in the beliefs and practices of Messianic Jews, this article shall attempt an overview of at least the key tenets of this movement.

THE ATTRACTION OF MESSIANIC JUDAISM

Messianic Judaism has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. The reasons for its appeal are many. First, the atrocities of the Holocaust made the Western world in general more sympathetic to Jews and Judaism. This is exemplified by the *Nostra Aetate* declaration of Pope Paul VI which erases some of the most censorious anti-Semitic statements in Catholic tradition.² Second, the appeal of Messianic Judaism is its seeming authenticity. Jesus was a Jew and lived a perfect life **under the Law of Moses** (Galatians 4:4).³ If we are to be like Jesus, does it not stand to reason that we too should live as He did? Would this not mean accepting the Law of Moses, adopting Jewish customs and beliefs, and speaking as He spoke?

Third, the New Testament reveals that the earliest Christians were Jewish and lived in accord with the Mosaic Law. James refers to the church as a "synagogue" (James 2:2, ASV), and it is clear that the observance of circumcision and Levitical dietary restrictions presented no problem until Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-16). Even after the admission of the Gentiles into the church certain

Jewish restrictions were still imposed (Acts 15:19-21). Fourth, Messianic Judaism is appealing because it is different. People are always interested in something new (Acts 17:21), and the novelty factor of Messianic Judaism is significant to most Christians. To some it is attractive to speak of *Yeshua' hamm'shiach* ("Jesus the Messiah") rather than "Jesus Christ"; of *habb'rith hach'dāshāh* rather than the "new covenant"; of their "rabbi" rather than their "minister."

Fifth, Messianic Judaism is appealing because it is similar to Christianity. Most of the converts to Messianic Judaism are not Jews but Christians. Therefore, it is in the best interest of Messianic Jewish congregations to stress their similarities with mainline or evangelical Christianity. As a result, those who "convert" to Messianic Judaism do not feel as though they are abandoning one religion for another. Sixth, the premillennialist strand of evangelical Christianity insists the Jews **continue to be** God's chosen people. They believe Jesus will someday establish an earthly kingdom based in Jerusalem, leading them to advocate Zionism (the political position that the state of Israel belongs exclusively to the Jewish people), which aligns their political beliefs with those of many North American Jews.

Seventh, many Protestant denominations embrace or even promote Messianic Judaism. One newsworthy example was the Avodath Yisrael congregation in suburban Philadelphia which was partially funded by the Presbyterian church of America.⁴ Messianic Judaism is designed in many places, then, to look simply like a more ancient and authentic Christianity. Many Christians feel they can turn to Messianic Judaism, sacrificing nothing while gaining a more genuine and biblical form of faith.

WHAT MESSIANIC JEWS BELIEVE

To summarize the beliefs of any religious group is a dangerous proposition. Imagine if someone were asked, “What do Christians believe?” The answers are not easy to give. Christians are incredibly diverse in what they believe and teach. While most of us recognize the problematic nature of diversity among our own religious groups, we do not apply the same perception to other faiths. For example, Christians in mostly monoreligious contexts (such as the American South) tend to think all Jews and Muslims believe and practice the same things. They do not. Attempting to characterize any movement in monolithic terms is unfair.

So we must admit that, when we study the Messianic Jewish movement, we find great diversity of belief and practice. Some Messianic Jews, for example, are unapologetically Christian, while some insist on being **Jewish** followers of Jesus, rejecting the “Christian” label. Some conduct worship services that feature Hebrew liturgies, while others toss in a few Hebrew terms (e.g., “rabbi,” “Yeshua”). Some accept the authority of rabbinic Jewish tradition, while others believe their authority ends with the New Testament. In other words, all Messianic Jews blend Jewish and Christian terms, traditions, and teachings, but the ratio of these elements differs greatly from one congregation to another. Nevertheless, we shall attempt to paint in broad strokes, and if the reader’s local version of Messianic Judaism happens to be different, perhaps we can be forgiven.

While some forms of Christianity have opened toward Jews and Judaism since the Holocaust, even viewing the two religions as compatible, Judaism itself has been more reluctant to sacrifice its distinctiveness. It

is true that liberal strands of Judaism, such as the Reform movement, have been more open to the inclusion of Messianic Judaism than other Jewish groups,⁵ but no Jewish denomination has so far extended “the right hand of fellowship” to Messianic Jews. Shapiro states, “all four major denominations [Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist] agree that Messianic Jews are not acceptably Jewish, and that Jewishness is utterly incompatible with belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ.”⁶

This brings us to the first significant difference between Messianic Judaism and Christianity. Messianic Jews not only affirm Jesus as the Messiah, but also believe He is the Son of God. One of the oldest creedal assertions of Judaism is the Shema, which states the fundamental principle that “God is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Although Christians do not view the passage as contradicting the notion of “God-in-three-persons,” Jews have always used the passage to defend absolute monotheism, ruling out the divinity of Jesus. Jews generally acknowledge that Jesus was a great prophet, but definitely not the Son of God. To admit otherwise is to deny one of the fundamental confessions of Jewish faith.

Another major difference is that Messianic Jews believe the Messiah **has come** in the form of Jesus of Nazareth whereas traditional Jews believe the Messiah **is yet to come**. A seat is still reserved at the traditional Passover celebration for Elijah, who is to herald the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). Jews take seriously that the “age to come” is still future. A third difference is the authority of the New Testament. While Jews will admit Jesus into the ranks of Jewish prophets or traditional sages, they will not extend the same privilege to the apostles.

They generally believe, along with much of New Testament scholarship, that Paul in particular corrupted the religion of Jesus, creating a hybrid faith that was eventually responsible for extracting the Jewish elements from Christianity. Messianic Jews, by contrast, continue to follow the teachings of the apostles.

CONCLUSION

David Stern, one of the primary voices within the tradition, insists that Messianic Jews are both fully Jewish **and** fully Christian.⁷ This might be possible if **all** the word “Jew” refers to is an ethnic identity. But the majority of Messianic Jews in the United States are not ethnically Jewish. That means these non-Jewish members of Messianic Judaism must believe they are Jewish in another way. As Ariel puts it,

Ironically, while advocating mostly conservative views on political, social, and cultural issues, this evangelical-Jewish movement is an avant-garde form of post-modern realities, in which individuals and communities exercise their freedom to carry a series of identities and struggle to negotiate between them. Such hybrids have become prevalent in contemporary Christian and Jewish communities, which, since the 1960s, often tended toward innovation and amalgamation of different traditions and practices.⁸

Messianic Judaism seeks a path between two faiths that have been historically opposed to one another. This is commendable in principle. Christians and Jews should engage in meaningful dialogue to learn from one another and to avoid many of the atrocities of the past.

That said, Messianic Judaism suffers from the same mistake that the ancient Christian-Jewish heresies committed. By seeking to be both Jews and Christians, they end up

being neither. It is instructive that, although the four modern divisions of Judaism disagree on exactly what constitutes **Jewishness**, they seem united in the belief that Messianic Jews are not authentically Jewish. It is mostly the Christian world that has created and sustained Messianic Judaism, and the greatest growth has come primarily from the evangelical Christian population.

Paul understood Christ to be the “end” of the Law (Romans 10:4), and Christianity to erase the distinctions between “Jew” and “Greek” (Galatians 3:28). The author of Hebrews understood the “new covenant” to mark a different era under which the Mosaic covenant would be obsolete (Hebrews 8:7-13). For Christians who accept the authority of the New Testament, these statements leave little room for Judaism. Christian-

ity is the great equalizer, but all must turn to Christ, for “there is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12). Judaism cannot accept the Messianic Jewish movement as an authentic expression of Judaism, and it seems the apostles could not accept the movement as an authentic version of Christianity. So what is Messianic Judaism?

ENDNOTES

¹ Jerome, *Epistle* 112.13 (translation mine).

² [hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

³ graph, *Jesus the Jew*, hardly raises an eyebrow today, but was quite controversial in its time. The book, among other works of New Testament scholarship, provoked the so-called “third quest of the historical Jesus,” a movement to situate Jesus properly within

his first-century Jewish context. It is no accident that Messianic Judaism was born anew in the 1970s. See Geza Vermes (1973), *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins).

⁴ a Christian? The Challenge of Messianic Judaism,” *Christian Century*, 3:22-27, May.

⁵ .g., Dan Cohn-Sherbock, and Fran Samuelson (2007), *Messianic Jews* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁶ The Unique Problem of Messianic Judaism,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, 14:2.

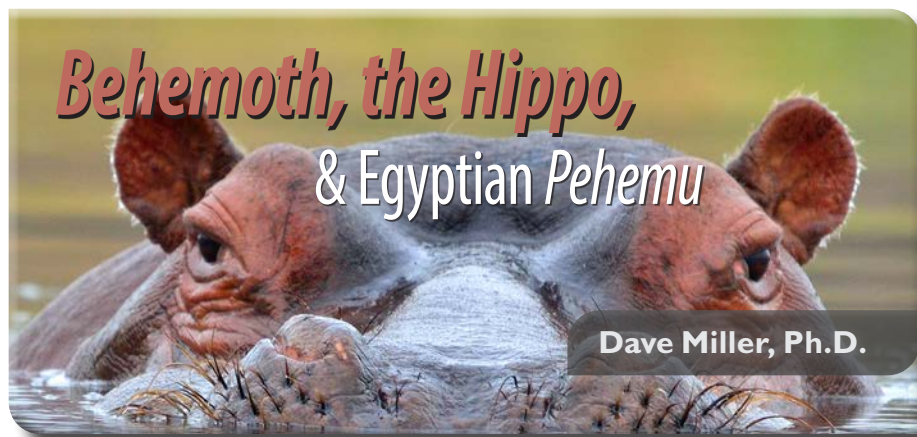
⁷ *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jerusalem/Gaithersburg, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications), p. 4.

⁸ Kind of Dialogue? Messianic Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations,” *CrossCurrents*, 62:326.



in *Jewish Encyclopedia* by Professor of Rabbinical Literature and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, Emil Hirsch, it was Jablonski who, “to make it correspond exactly with that animal, compared an Egyptian form, ‘p-ehe-mu’ (= ‘water-ox’), which, however, **does not exist**.”¹ In other words, the term *pehemu* was **fabricated** by Jablonski. Jablonski’s viewpoint has been repeated by others, including Hebrew lexicographer William Gesenius as well as Hebraist Franz Delitsch. However, in his *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, Gesenius added this admission: “It is true that the word so compounded is **not now found in the remains of the Coptic language**.”² Likewise Delitsch adds to his discussion of the signification this remark: “an instance in favour of this is **still wanting**.”³

Meanwhile, in their prestigious Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon,



Most commentators today seemingly refuse to consider even the possibility that the Behemoth of Job 40:15-24 refers to an extinct dinosaur. They appear to have bought into the notion that humans and dinosaurs never lived together and thus suggest that the hippopotamus is being described. One effort to substantiate this identification is the claim that the Hebrew word for “behemoth” corresponds linguistically to the Egyptian word *pehemu*

which, it is further claimed, is the word for “water ox.” Following the publication of Bochart’s *Hierozoicon* in 1663, which identified Behemoth with the hippopotamus, Paul Ernst Jablonski (1693-1757), German Reformed theologian and orientalist, proposed a connection between the Hebrew word “behemoth” and the Egyptian language, using the alleged connection to support the contention that Behemoth is the hippo. According to an article

Koehler, et al. note that the connection “develops from **non-attested** Eg[yp]tian *pehe-mau*.”⁴ Specifically critical of Jablonski’s work on the subject, Cheyne declares: “The view of Budde, Ewald, and most recent critics, that Behemoth is a Hebraized form of *p-ehe-mou*, ‘water-ox,’ is **a mere fancy**.... The derivation of Behemoth from **a falsely imagined Egyptian word** (which, by the way, leaves the final letter of Behemoth unaccounted for) is not the only specimen of Jablonski’s misdirected acuteness.”⁵ He then offers an extensive evaluation of the misconception. Budde also credits Jablonski for the Egyptian connection,⁶ and even Ewald’s allusion is tentative when he says “Behemoth **appears** to be the Hebrew form of the Egyptian name for the hippopotamus.”⁷ William Drake asserts the same view, but prefaces the assertion with “**probably**.”⁸ A.R. Fausset has “**seems** to be.”⁹

Challenges to the Egyptian derivation came as early as 1752 when Leonard Chappelow, Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge from 1720 to his death in 1768, insisted: “We need not with Bochart and others have recourse to the Egyptian names...as if the sound of *behemoth* was of Egyptian original; for the same termination is both masculine and feminine singular in Hebrew.”¹⁰ In the commentary on Job in the *International Critical and Exegetical Commentary* series, written by S.R. Driver and George Gray, additional issue is taken with the Egyptian derivation theory: “No more satisfactory etymology has been suggested [other than Hebrew—DM]; it would not have been surprising to find here an Egyptian term; but the known

Egyptian term for the hippopotamus (*vert*) **has no resemblance to behemah**: and there is **no evidence** that the often cited *p-ehe-mou* **ever existed**.”¹¹

English churchman, linguist, and editor of the Speaker’s Commentary on the Bible, F.C. Cook likewise concluded that Jablonski’s Egyptian derivation postulation is “open to grave, and indeed insuperable objection.”¹² Cheyne adds “there is no philological basis for this opinion.”¹³ Indeed, according to distinguished professor of Old Testament John Hartley, “the suggested derivation...**has never been substantiated**.”¹⁴

In an article written by A.K. Eyma on the Egyptology Forum website titled “Egyptian Loan-Words in English,” “behemoth” is listed under the category “Debatable or Speculative Loans,” with the following commentary:

Used to denote a colossal animal (and hence sometimes figuratively for a colossal military or political apparatus); is a direct loan of Hebrew *b:hemot* (behemoth), used in Job 40:15 for some kind of very

large animal. In form the word is the plural of Hebrew *b:hemah* “beast,” “animal,” so likely the plural serves here as a so-called ‘plural of dignity’, comparable to the Hebrew *Elohim* (God) and the term *ilanu* in the Amarna Letters. In that case behemoth just means “very great beast”. However, many scholars have suggested that it is a loan of AE *p-3iH-mw* (pa-ihe-mu, *pe-che-maw) meaning “the water-ox.” In that case the final Hebrew form would merely have been influenced by the native and similar looking *behemah*, so a sort of popular etymology being done on the Egyptian loan-word. **I’m not convinced until someone shows me an Ancient Egyptian text mentioning a pehemu (used for example to refer to a hippopotamus). The plain Hebrew explanation seems straightforward enough to me.**¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Neither the etymology of the word “behemoth” nor the physical description of Behemoth provided by God Himself in Job 40 match the hippopotamus. So why the continued resistance to the idea that this beast, described by God thousands of years ago, was a dinosaur?

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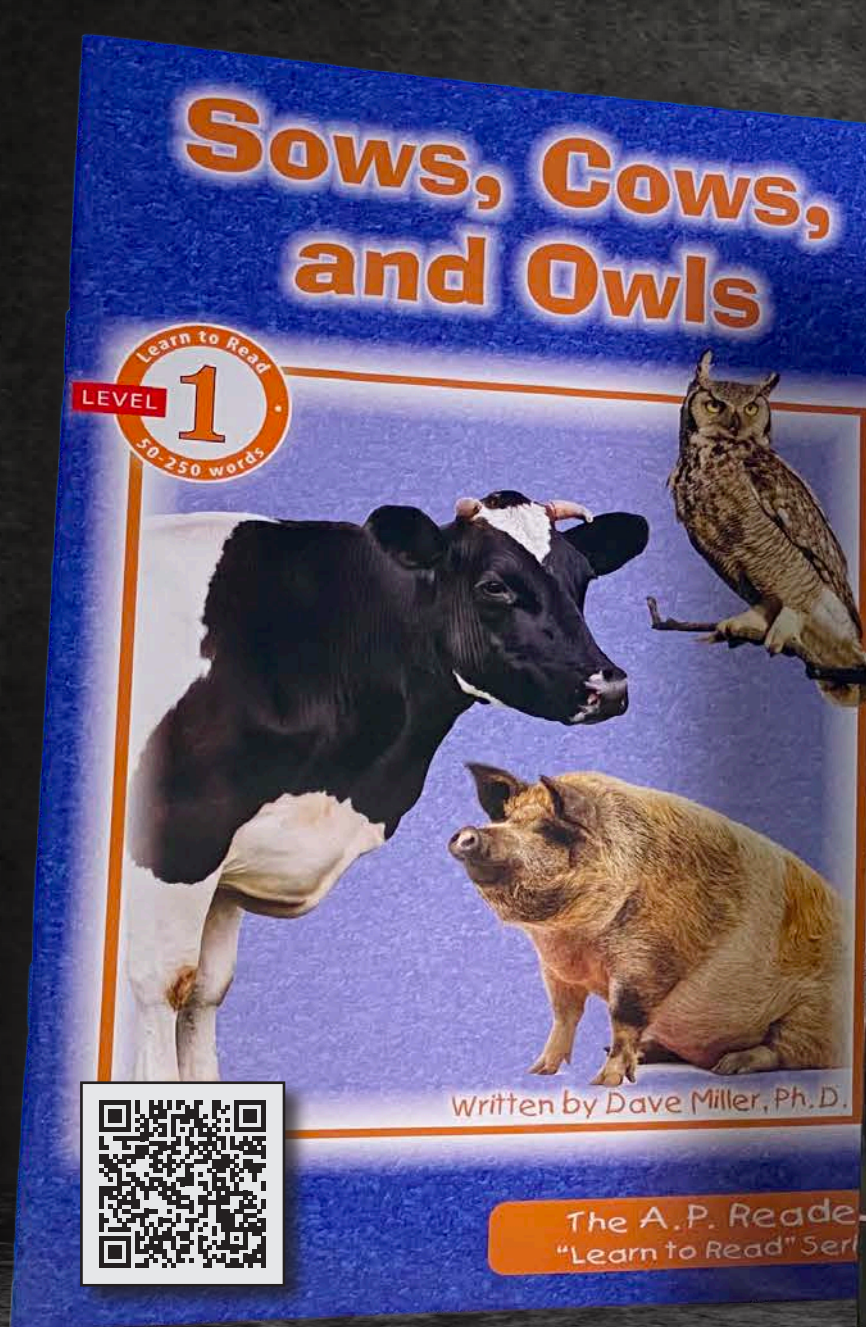
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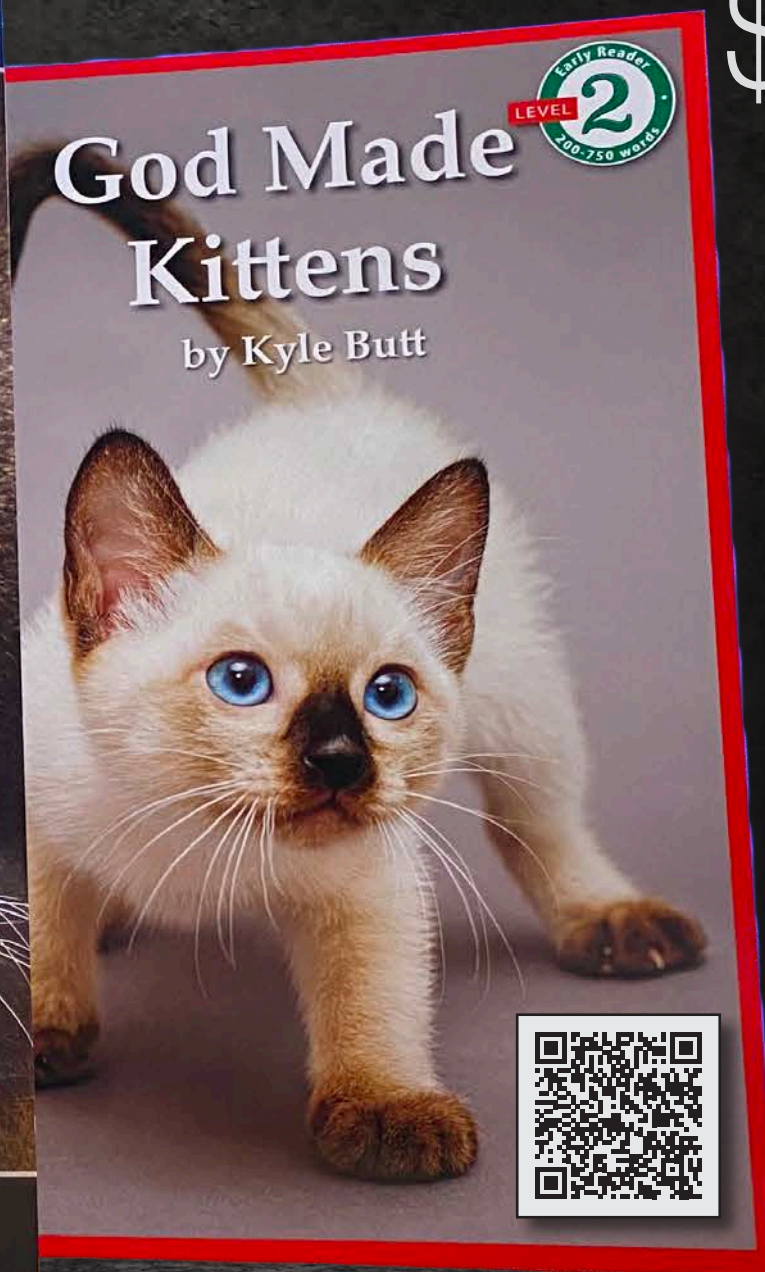
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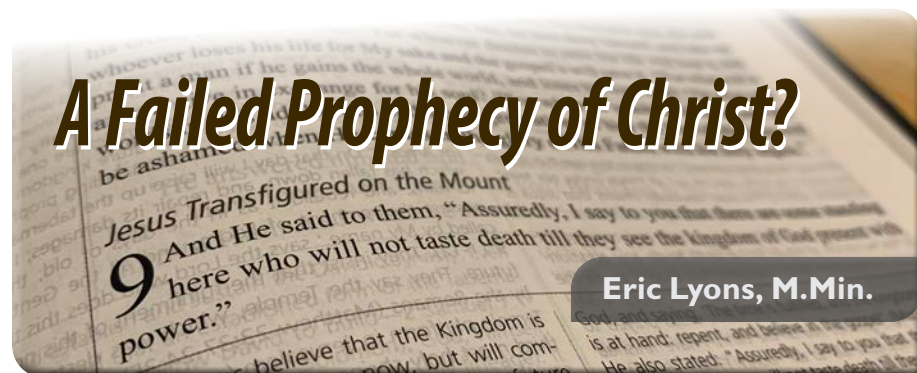
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ENDNOTES

- 1 Behemoth," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Emil G. Hirsch, Kaufmann Kohler, Solomon Schechter, Isaac Broyd, 8:36, emp. added, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9841-leviathan-and-behe-moth>.
- 2 *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979 reprint), p. 105, emp. added.
- 3 *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Francis Bolton (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), second edition, p. 358, emp. added.
- 4 Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (1994-2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic edition), p. 112, emp. added.
- 5 Book of Job and its Latest Commenta-tor, Part II," *The Expositor*, 6[1]:30, July, emp. added.
- 6 *Das Buch Hiob* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), p. 244.
- 7 *Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Williams & Norgate), p. 322, emp. added.
- 8 *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. William Smith (London: John Murray), p. 182.
- 9 David Brown (no date), *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 343.
- 10 *A Com-mentary on the Book of Job* (Cambridge: J. Bentham), pp. 546-547.
- 11 *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 326, emp. added.
- 12 *The Holy Bible: Job-Song of Solomon* (New York: Scrib-ner, Armstrong & Co.), 4:140.
- 13 Leviathan" in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, ed. T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (Toronto: George N. Morang & Co.), 1:519.
- 14 *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerd-mans), p. 523. See also E.A. Budge (1920), *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (London: John Murray), 1:243-245, 382, 428, 530, 531, 539; 2:827, 832, 839, 873, 877, 882.
- 15 Words in English," Egyptology Forum, <http://www.egyptologyforum.org/AEloans.html>, emp. added.



According to *The Skeptics Annotated Bible*, in Mark 9:1, "**Jesus falsely prophesies** that the end of the world will come within his listeners' lifetimes."¹ Skeptic Dennis McKinsey calls this prophecy² "one of those classic predictions that has haunted his supporters ever since, forcing them to concoct an endless number of rationalizations to explain its failure."³

What exactly did Jesus predict in Mark 9:1? Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Jesus prophesied that some of His listeners on that occasion (including His disciples—Mark 8:34) would still be alive to "see the kingdom of God come with power" (NIV).

Skeptics contend that the coming kingdom Jesus mentioned in this

passage is a reference to "the end of the world,"⁴ when Jesus returns (Matthew 24:36-25:46; 2 Peter 3:10-13) and when "an entrance will be supplied...abundantly **into the everlasting kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11). The same eternal, "heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:18) that Peter and Paul eagerly anticipated is supposedly the same kingdom about which Jesus prophesied in Mark 9:1. Are skeptics correct?

As is the case with so many so-called "contradictions," skeptics have once again **assumed** a sense (or definition) of a word, which cannot be proven. They have chosen a meaning that contradicts the passage rather than considering a logical sense of the word "kingdom" which perfectly fits with Jesus' prophecy.

Admittedly, **at times** God's kingdom is rightly understood in its

future sense. After all, Jesus taught: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him.... Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the **kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:31,34). This "**kingdom**" is the heavenly phase of God's kingdom, which the righteous will "inherit" at the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:50).

However, there is a real, biblical sense in which God's Kingdom exists **in the present**—and has been in existence since the first century. In fact, long before Jesus correctly prophesied of this coming Kingdom, the Old Testament prophets did so. Isaiah and Micah prophesied of "the mountain" of the Lord's house" being established in Jerusalem "in the latter days" (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). About 200 years later, in the sixth century B.C., Daniel recorded a divinely revealed, prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Daniel 2:1-45). According to Daniel, the king dreamed of a great image with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. In the dream, a stone was cut out of a mountain

without hands and struck the image. The clay, iron, bronze, silver, and gold were crushed and became like dust, carried away by the wind. But, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that the image he saw represented various earthly kingdoms. Babylon was the head of gold, while the other elements of the image stood for future empires that would rise up after Babylon. History has shown that the chest and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The belly and thighs of bronze were for the Grecian Empire. And the legs of iron and feet of both iron and clay stood for the Roman Empire.

Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that it would be during the days of this fourth kingdom⁶ (the Roman Empire) that the God of heaven would “set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;...it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). Its beginning would be small, like the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands, but it eventually would consume all other kingdoms and become a great mountain filling the whole Earth.

What is this kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, and Daniel spoke? What is this great kingdom that would eventually fill the whole Earth? It’s the spiritual Kingdom of Christ—the Church. More than 500 years before the Church was established, God revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar in a prophetic dream that a Kingdom made “without hands”—a spiritual Kingdom of divine origin—would be established during the days of the Roman Empire.

This entity is the Kingdom that Jesus prophesied would come during the lifetime of His first-century hearers. Jesus not only prophesied of this Kingdom in Matthew 16:28 (as well as in the parallel passages in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27), He also predicted it just a few verses earlier

in Matthew 16:18-19. To the apostle Peter, Jesus said: “I will build **My church**, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**....” Jesus promised to establish His Church and then equated the Church with the Kingdom of heaven, to which He gave Peter “the keys.” What do keys do? They unlock doors, thus allowing entrance. When did Peter open the doors to the Kingdom? Only a few months later in Acts 2 when Peter and the apostles were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4), preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and about 3,000 souls became Christians (2:41), submitting to the authoritative lordship of Jesus Christ—the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15-16; Ephesians 1:21). On that day, the Day of Pentecost, the Kingdom of God (in its present sense) came “with power” (Mark 9:1), just as Jesus had prophesied.

From Acts 2 onward, God’s Kingdom has existed, and New Testament Christians have been servants in this Kingdom. To the church at Colosse, Paul noted how God “**has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love**” (Colossians 1:13). With the Christians in Asia Minor, the apostle John

declared that he shared “**in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**” (Revelation 1:9). Indeed, the Christians in Asia Minor nearly 2,000 years ago were **already** fellow citizens in the **Kingdom** of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christians are not “haunted” by Mark 9:1, nor do we have to “concoct an endless number of rationalizations to explain its [alleged] failure.”⁷ A rational, biblical, easy-to-understand explanation exists: words have different meanings, and Jesus used the word “kingdom” in this verse in reference to His Church—God’s spiritual Kingdom in the present. Indeed, those who heard Jesus’ prophecy of Mark 9:1 saw Christ’s Kingdom come in their lifetime.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Steve Wells (2020), *The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/mk/9.html#1n>, emp. added.
- ² Referring specifically to Matthew’s account of the prophecy: Matthew 16:28.
- ³ C. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 308.
- ⁴ Wells.
- ⁵ The term “mountain” is sometimes used figuratively in the Old Testament in reference to a particular government or kingdom (Psalm 76:1-4; Jeremiah 51:25; Isaiah 11:9; Daniel 2:35).
- ⁶ Equivalent to “the latter days” mentioned in Isaiah 2:1-4 and Micah 4:1-4.
- ⁷ McKinsey, p. 308, bracketed word added.

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The Obedience of Faith in Romans

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The doctrine of justification by faith has been the subject of endless discussion and disagreement within Christianity for over 500 years. Many have gone awry in their understanding of Romans by misdefining the word (*pistis*) that underlies the English terms “believe” and “faith.” The primary formative influence on the interpretation of Romans in the Protestant Reformation was the Catholic emphasis on human works for salvation.¹ Protestant denominationalism thereby conceives Romans as a contrast between “works” (defined as any human effort) and “faith” (defined as mental assent/acceptance of Jesus without any actions to be performed). The Protestant world is so thoroughly saturated with this understanding that to question it is virtual heresy. Writing in 1875 in his respected commentary on Romans, Moses Lard noted the irrational dogmatism associated with this viewpoint:

The extreme doctrine of justification by faith only, has so completely engrossed the mind of commentators, since the sixteenth century, that it seems never to have occurred to them, as even a possible fact, that Paul may not have been writing in their exclusive interest. They have regarded him as certainly of their order, and, as a consequence, have written him up into a partisan, only more partisan than themselves. The result has been that in many

places their works are a complete perversion of the truth, and not an exhibition of it.²

Romans **actually** contrasts, on the one hand, the prevailing Jewish notion that they could be saved on the basis of their fleshly connection to Abraham and the Mosaic Law alone (a law which had been given exclusively to them) with, on the other hand, the sole necessity of rendering obedience to Christ and the Gospel. Romans emphasizes salvation by **faith** not **flesh**. The term “works” is **not** used to include actions humans perform that God requires (like water baptism). Baptism is not a “work” in the sense of the term as used in Romans. Rather, the context of Romans indicates that “works” refers to those actions that the Jews claimed enabled them to be acceptable to God without becoming Christians—circumstances surrounding the benefits accrued by them due to their ethnicity, their longstanding connection to Abraham.

Further, the essence of “faith” in Romans (and throughout the Bible) is trust that is accompanied by compliance with God’s directives—what James describes as a **living**, versus a **dead**, faith (James 2:17,26). The human actions that God requires **precedent** to His bestowal of physical or spiritual gifts are not seen by Him to be meritorious works by which a person **earns** or **deserves** the gift

He provides. Rather, they are given by God as **conditions**.

Salvation is only “unconditional” in the sense that God enacted the means by which humans may be forgiven without any involvement on their part. In fact, God decided to provide the means of atonement for human sin **before** He ever created the first human beings. Jesus would (and did) come to offer Himself as the atonement/propitiation for sin **without humans doing anything** to bring it about (Romans 3:25). That decision was an **eternal** intention (Ephesians 3:11). Indeed, Jesus is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). No human can perform any acts of legal merit by which he can save himself or atone for his own sin. On the other hand, salvation is “conditional” in the sense that God requires the exercise of the human will in the reception of salvation. Both mind and body must be brought into play. Faith itself is such an action—a “work” that man must perform in order to be pleasing to God (John 6:29). In this sense, the New Testament forcefully declares that you can—**and must**—save yourself (See Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:12).

The Holy Spirit established this definition of faith in the book of Romans—at the beginning as well as at the end. The Greek phrase he inspired Paul to utilize in 1:5 and 16:26 is *hupakoein pisteos*—“obedient faith” or the obedience which faith manifests or expresses. In his respected Greek grammar, Baptist scholar A.T. Robertson insisted that the phrase is to be understood as a “subjective genitive”³—“the obedience which springs from faith”⁴—rather than an “objective genitive” meaning “obedience to the faith.” The phrase, in fact, characterizes and clarifies the meaning of “faith” as used in Romans.

Several Greek authorities agree with this assessment. In the latest edition of the “BDAG” Greek lexicon most

recently revised by Frederick Danker, after noting the objective genitive meaning, the author states: “But it may be better to render it more generally with a view to (promoting) obedience which springs from faith.”⁵ Writing in *The Expository Times*, Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor of Wycliffe College commented specifically on the Greek phrase in Romans 1:5 and 16:26—

Surely in both cases “obedience that springs from faith” is intended, πίστewς being a genitive of source or material.... If “the faith” (i.e., a body of formulated doctrine), had been intended, doubtless the definite article would have been used.... The emphasis is on **the obedience to God which comes as a result of faith in Christ**.... Christ was not only the example to Gentile Christians of the perfect obedience which springs from perfect faith, but also the source of power whereby obedience to God could be realized in their own lives.⁶

In his *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek*, H.P.V. Nunn notes “The Genitive of Source or Material” and gives as an example “The righteousness of faith (i.e., that springs from faith)”⁷—a parallel expression to “the obedience of faith.” Respected commentator J.B. Lightfoot interprets the phrase to mean “unto obedience which springs from faith.”⁸ In his *Word Studies in the Testament*, Marvin Vincent says, “Obedience of faith is the obedience which characterizes and proceeds from faith.”⁹

While Greek grammarians possess considerable unanimity on the matter, translators have struggled with the phrase and sent mixed signals to their English audiences. For example, the KJV has in the first occurrence of the phrase in Romans (1:5), “for obedience to the faith among all nations,” and in the second occurrence (16:26), “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith”—though the phrase is the same in both

verses. The NKJV has “for obedience to the faith” in both verses. The ASV has “unto obedience of faith” in both verses. The NASB has “to bring about the obedience of faith” in 1:5 (as does the ESV in both verses) and “leading to obedience of faith” in 16:26. The RSV has “to bring about the obedience of faith” in both verses. The NIV has “to the obedience that comes from faith” in 1:5 and “so that all nations might believe and obey him” in 16:26. Though resorting somewhat to paraphrase, the renderings in the NIV fully capture the nuances of the phrase. Interestingly, the Complete Jewish Bible renders the phrase “trust-grounded obedience.” The International Standard Version (ISV) has “faithful obedience” in 1:5 and “the obedience that springs from faith” in 16:26. The Jubilee Bible 2000 (JUB) has “that they might hear and obey by faith” in 16:26. God’s Word Translation has “the obedience that is associated with faith.”¹⁰ The Voice translation has “obedient faith” in 1:5 and “faith-filled obedience” in 16:26, while the Message Bible MSG has “obedient trust” in 1:5 and “obedient belief” in 16:26.

Faith in the book of Romans **includes** obedience to external acts **preceding** forgiveness. Or as Greek lexicographer Joseph Thayer explained the meaning of *pisteuo* (“I believe”): “Used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e., *a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ*.”¹¹ No wonder Paul repeatedly uses the words “obedience” (1:5; 5:19; 6:16; 16:19,26) and “obey” (2:8-twice; 6:12; 6:16-twice).

In stark contradistinction with Paul, modern denominationalism insists that faith does not include any further acts of obedience; rather, one need only “accept Jesus as Savior” by saying, “I receive you into my heart

as my personal Savior.” Hence, water baptism is considered non-essential to salvation. The Holy Spirit anticipated this unwarranted conclusion, not only by stressing the essentiality of water baptism in 6:3-4, but by positioning two “red flags”—one at the beginning (1:5) and one at the end (16:26) of this marvelous treatise. These majestic sentinels essentially warn readers regarding the nature and meaning of the “faith” which characterizes the book of Romans.

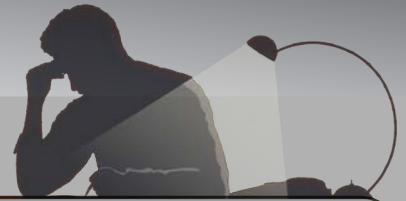
ENDNOTES

- 1 indulgences, assigned penance, gifts to build cathedrals, Stations of the Cross, etc.
- 2 *Commentary on Paul’s Letter to Romans* (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing), p. v.
- 3 *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: George Doran), p. 500.
- 4 *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press), 4:324.
- 5 *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), third edition, p. 1028.
- 6 Note on ‘εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως’ in Romans i.5 and xvi.26,” *The Expository Times*, 55:305-306, emp. added. He cites Acts 6:7 and Romans 10:8 as instances where the article indicates “the faith.”
- 7 *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 42.
- 8 *Notes on Epistles of Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan), p. 246.
- 9 *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 3:5. See also W.E. Vine (1966), *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell), p. 123, who also takes the phrase as a subjective genitive and identifies “faith” as “the initial act of obedience.”
- 10 NOG).
- 11 *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 511, italics in orig, emp. added.



NOTE FROM

The Editor



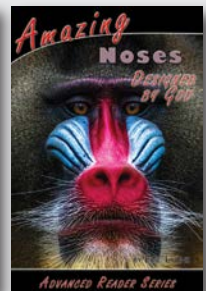
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Dave Miller